

Āloka Sutta – Lights

(AN.2, 270 p)

In this short discourse, the Supreme Buddha explains the four kinds of lights.

“*Cattārome, bhikkhave, ālokā. Katame cattāro? Candāloko, sūriyāloko, aggāloko, paññāloko—ime kho, bhikkhave, cattāro ālokā. Etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, imesaṃ catunnaṃ ālokānaṃ yadidaṃ paññāloko*”ti.

Bhikkhus, there are four kinds of lights. What are those four? They are;

1. The light of the moon (*Candāloko*)
2. The light of the sun (*Sūriyāloko*)
3. The light of fire (*Aggāloko*)
4. The light of wisdom (*Paññāloko*)

Bhikkhus, out of these lights the light of wisdom is the foremost.

Here, the Buddha emphasizes the significance of the light of wisdom. Also, Buddhism always encourages us to develop wisdom to the maximum level on the path of liberation as much as we can. The reason is that the cessation of suffering completely depends on reducing ignorance, and reducing ignorance depends on developing wisdom.

Wisdom - පඤ්ඤා

Wisdom or intelligence, which mainly helps us to overcome suffering (or unsatisfactoriness) and attain liberation from defilements, is highly valued and utmost important in Buddhism. The level of our happiness depends on the level of our wisdom. Our real success depends on how much we have achieved wisdom. Because of that, wisdom has been compared to a gem (පඤ්ඤා නරානං රතන). Wisdom brings purification (පඤ්ඤාය පරිසුච්ඤති). There is no other bright light like wisdom (නන්ථි පඤ්ඤා සමං ආභා). Wisdom is used in several terms in Pali language such as *Sammā Ditti* (සම්මං දිට්ඨි), *Āloka* (ආලෝක), *Ñnanā* (ඤ්ඤා), *Pannā* (පඤ්ඤා), *Vijjā* (විජ්ජා), *Amoha* (අමෝහ). Wisdom should be developed from the beginning till the end to the maximum level of the path of enlightenment. Therefore Buddhism always guides us to gain wisdom through all kinds of advices that the supreme Buddha explained in his entire life. Wisdom in Buddhism is divided into two; the understanding of Karmic law and the understanding of impermanence. As much as we have this understanding, we will be able to see the reality of the world and understand how suffering doesn't arise and what is the path for real happiness.

According to Buddhism, four factors help us to develop wisdom. Presenting these four qualities, Buddhism encourages us to practice the path of purification as much as we can. Those four factors are;

1. Association with a good friend who explains the Buddha's real message
(*Sappurisa samsevo* - සප්පුරිස සංසේවෝ)
2. Listening to the Buddha's Message (*Saddhamma savanam* - සද්ධම්ම සවණං)
3. Wise Reflection (*Yoniso manasikāro* - යෝනිසෝ මනසිකාරෝ)
4. Practicing the Buddha's message (*Dhammānudhamma patipatti* - ධම්මානුධම්මපටිපත්ති)

When we associate noble friends, we can listen to the sublime truth that the Buddha emphasized. Listening to this noble message, we go forward practicing the message with wise reflection. Here, wise reflection plays a main role in the path of enlightenment.

In the discourse of Sabbasawa (MN. 1), further the Buddha explains the importance in practicing wise reflection. "The destruction of the defilements is for the one who knows and sees, not for the one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? It is wise reflection and unwise reflection. When one attends wisely, unrisen defilements don't arise and arisen defilements increase. When one attends unwisely, unrisen defilements arise and arisen defilements are abandoned.

In our lives, if we make sure that no defilements (taints) arise in our thinking, but increase wholesome thoughts, it is wise reflection. Protecting our mind from negative thoughts that are evil which disturb our peace of mind, we develop the mind to the maximum level with high spiritual progress. Mental condition is the main reason which decides whether we are happy. Mind is the forerunner of all mental conditions (මනෝ පුබ්බංගමා ධම්මා). Also mind is chief (මනෝ සෙව්ධා) and mind-made are mental conditions (මනෝමයා). By practicing the spiritual path, wise investigation guides us in the correct path preserving the mind.

To reflect on wisely, we should have enough knowledge through listening to the Buddha's Message. Especially, we may have knowledge about the Karmic law (කර්මඵල න්‍යාය), the dependent origination (පටිච්ච සමුප්පාදය), impermanence (අනිත්‍යතාව), the noble eightfold path (ආර්ය අෂ්ටාංගික මාර්ගය), the four noble truth (චතුරාර්ය සත්‍යය), three disciplines (ත්‍රිශික්ෂාව) and three characteristics (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). When we experience about the world through our six senses, we are able to reflect on our experience through the Buddha's message. Knowledge of the Dhamma is the first step of the path to liberation. Wise reflection and practice of meditation (tranquility - සමථ and insight - විපස්සනා) are other two steps.

The supreme Buddha once points out "I don't see any other important quality other than wise reflection (යෝනිසෝ මනසිකාර) which helps to decrease defilements and develop spiritual faculties." The wise reflection or wise investigation is related to mindfulness (සති) and wisdom (පඤ්ඤා). Reflection or attention that is always together with mind is a thought. This can be wholesome or unwholesome. Unwholesome attention creates negative thoughts, words and behaviors. It brings suffering. Wholesome attention creates positive thoughts, words, and behaviors bringing happiness.

In our day to day life, if we experience hardships, sorrow and suffering, it's an indication that we may have lost our wise reflection. We have mistakes, sufferings, tears, lamentations because of unwise reflection. If we can keep wise reflection every moment developing mindfulness, we are able

to overcome all kinds of mental disturbances. Our main goal in our lives is happiness. As much as we like to live happily, we have to develop wise reflection continuously and promptly.

It is important to know how to apply wise reflection in our day to day life. For examples, when we meet a person, we mostly think about his physical appearance, and we tend to forget that he or she has a mind. In reality we meet a person in the world because he or she has a mind and not just a physical body. If someone doesn't have a mind, we never say he is a person, but we call it is a dead body. According to Buddhism, when we practice 'wise investigation', as soon as we remember a person, if we are able to reflect on his mind as well as his physical body, we can overcome 50 percent defilements that are arisen by ignorance of reality. Further if we can practice loving kindness meditation about the people, our mind is always ready to forgive anybody. The highest and best level of practicing loving kindness is looking at others as our own only son or daughter. If we have this kind of attitude, it means we have overcome a lot of hardships, stress, anger, jealousy form our mind. This may help to overcome a lot of sufferings. On the other hand, as soon as we see a person, if we can understand that person as a result of five aggregates (forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness), our mind is in the highest level which is completely free from suffering.

When we investigate our own mind, it is clear that we are mostly thinking about our past experiences than the present and the future. More than 75 percent of our time in our life we live in the past. When we think about our past experiences, unconsciously, our mind goes to the past without our knowledge resulting we live in the past again. Unfortunately, we don't know this nature of our mind because of ignorance. Thinking about past is not the fault or cause of suffering, but the fault is that the mind goes to the past unknowingly. Because of this misconception, we experience the past like present. For an example, you continue to think of an incident that someone blamed you in the past, you are blamed again and again as long as you think about this incident without mindfulness. That person has blamed you once, but you are blamed again and again because of this ignorance. Also, when one of your close relatives dies, you worry thinking about him, as he is still alive. We mostly suffer living in the past. To overcome this false impression, we have to live with wise investigation. That is why the supreme Buddha emphasized the importance of practicing wise reflection. The highest wise reflection is seeing the dependent origination. Understanding of the dependent origination means understanding of the Dhamma. Also understanding of the Dhamma is the way to see the Buddha. That is why Buddhism says;

He who sees the Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma.
(*Yo paticcasamuppādam passati so dhamma passati*)

He who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha.
(*Yo dhamma passati so mam passati*)

This is the real way how to see the Dhamma and the Buddha as well.

We usually experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. When objects such as forms, sounds, smell, taste reach our senses, we experience about the world. The

nature of this experience is arising at the moment and ceasing instantly. **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence.** (*Ahutva Sambutam hutva sambutam = අනුත්වා සම්භුතං හුත්වා න භවිස්සති*). It means if we experience something now, it didn't happen in the past in the same way like now. Also present experience doesn't go to the future in the same way. If anyone can understand this reality, he is ready to give up extremes about the past and the future. Also, he tries to live in the present moment seeing arising and ceasing wisely with full awareness.

In this situation to get rid of this ignorance, wise reflection guides us to live in the present moment seeing world reality as impermanence. Our real happiness depends on how much we are clever to live in the present moment. Here, it doesn't sound that we forget our past or future. We may have good memory about the past and the future, but we don't run to the past and future without mindfulness. we see the past and future with full awareness. Buddhism never says to forget the past or the future. When we think about something in the past or the future, we may have real awareness that now I read my mind. Here we practice to see the past and the future with full awareness about the present.

To make this experience permanent, we have to follow the noble eightfold path. It is,

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| 1. Right (Harmoneous) Understanding (<i>Sammā ditthi</i>) | සම්මා දිට්ඨි |
| 2. Right Intention/Thoughts (<i>Sammā samkappa</i>) | සම්මා සංකප්ප |
| 3. Right Speech (<i>Sammā vācā</i>) | සම්මා වාචා |
| 4. Right Action (<i>Sammā kammantha</i>) | සම්මා කම්මන්ත |
| 5. Right Livelihood (<i>Samm ājīva</i>) | සම්මා ආජීව |
| 6. Right Effort (<i>Sammā vāyāma</i>) | සම්මා වායාම |
| 7. Right Mindfulness (<i>Sammā sati</i>) | සම්මා සති |
| 8. Right Concentration (<i>Sammā samādhi</i>) | සම්මා සමාධි |

As much as we have right understanding about the path listening to the Buddha's message, we are ready to practice other steps. Day by day we go forward in this path seeing the reality which is impermanence wisely. These eight steps consist of three disciplines those are virtue, tranquility (or concentration) and wisdom. With the understanding of The Noble Eightfold Path, we form self-discipline in our speech and behavior. Discipline helps us to go forward in the path of purification practicing meditation. In purification of the mind, we mainly use two meditation techniques that are concentration or tranquility and insight. In the tranquility meditation, we keep our mind with a particular good thought. As a result of concentrated mind, we can live for a long time without suffering and stress, but it is not permanent and it can be changed. Here we practice and develop our awareness in our mind and body. We practice to do all kinds of activities mindfully. Mindfulness is one of the most important qualities that we have to develop for purification of our mind.

Concentration is not enough to eradicate defilements completely. That is why Buddhism says us to develop another step that is insight meditation for permanent happiness. Here, with the

concentrated mind, we reflect on the three characteristics of existence all kinds of things mental and physical on three characteristics of existence (ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). They are;

- i. Impermanence - (*Anicca*) අනිත්‍ය
- ii. Unsatisfactoriness - (*Dukkha*) දුක්ඛ
- iii. Selflessness - (*Anatta*) අනාත්ම

We reflect again and again on these three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhana* - ත්‍රිලක්ෂණ). As a result of practicing this world reality, we develop wisdom with the knowledge of impermanence. Simultaneously, we develop five qualities which are confidence (*Sadda* - සද්ධා), effort (*Viriya* - විරිය), mindfulness (*Sati* - සති), concentration (*Samadhi* - සමාධි) and wisdom (*Panna* - පඤ්ඤ). As the result of practicing The Noble Eightfold Path with mindfulness and wisdom, we gradually reach to the real happiness decreasing defilements. Finally, we are able to live in the present moment with full awareness seeing arising and ceasing without any desirable attachment or destruction. It means we have overcome unsatisfactoriness.

Dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge. When you dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge, the basis itself should be investigated thus: ‘From what are sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair born? How are they produced?’

*Atta deepā bhikkhave viharatha atta saranā na anna saranā,
Dhamma deepā bhikkhave dhamma saranā na anna saranā.*

(Attadeepa Sutta)

Dwell with yourself as an island as a refuge with no other refuge!
Dwell with the Dhamma as an island as a refuge with no other refuge!

Oh! All conditions are impermanent,
their nature is to arise and cease
having arisen, they cease;
their stilling is true bliss.”

May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

(සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සුවපත් වෙත්වා!)

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